



Conference Brief

Strategic Studies Institute

U.S. Army War College, and

The Center for International Relations, Boston University

Mil-to-Mil: Assessing U.S. National Security Cooperation Strategies

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Key Insights:

- Mil-to Mil programs are effective for transferring military skills at the tactical and operational levels.
- Transferring values about military professionalism, human rights, and civil-military relations is difficult to measure, but is probably not very effective unless other institutions in the client country also support change.
- Programs are most likely to be successful when they are consistent with long-term U.S. goals and policies supported by both the Department of State and Defense.
- Programs are more likely to be successful when the U.S. and client countries establish mutual trust and design and execute programs as near-equal partners with common security interests.
- Historically, effective military assistance has had country-teams supported by a strong ambassador, had cooperation between the ambassador and regional combatant commander, had the minimum practical U.S. presence, and was based on unambiguous policies and standards.

The Center for International Relations, Boston University, in cooperation with the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, and with support from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, sponsored a conference, "Mil-to-Mil: Assessing U.S. National Security Cooperation Strategies" on November 13-14, 2002. The conference, held at Boston University, attracted over 80 participants and attendees. The conference sponsors selected Latin America as the geographical area of emphasis, based on the region's long, rich, but sometimes controversial history of U.S. mil-to-mil relations.

The program was designed to: (1) set the strategic stage by determining what mil-to-mil programs are required and expected to achieve within the context of U.S. Theater Security Cooperation Plans (TSCP), (2) provide the historical context for evaluating current programs through a series of case studies, (3) provide current strategic perspectives of U.S. Government agencies with mandates to implement TSCP, (4) obtain reports about field agencies implementing mil-to-mil programs, (5) obtain reports from countries who are partners in the mil-to-mil programs, and (6) discuss the changes needed to ensure future success of these programs. Six panels were organized to address the six program objectives, but each panel acknowledged its necessary relationship to the other five.

Requirements and Expectations.

Mil-to-mil programs represent a large number and variety of activities. The Bush administration changed the over-arching strategic context from Theater "Engagement" to "Security

Cooperation,” but many of the programs and goals remain relatively unchanged. The formal process for regional commanders in chief, now combatant commanders, to submit their plans to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, has existed for a decade. Changes made by the Bush administration increase Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) oversight of the process and attempt to clearly link TSCPs with the National Security Strategy (NSS). The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) is a new addition to the NSS and permeates TSCP requirements.

Current mil-to-mil programs in Latin America must contend with the checkered history of U.S. political relations with Central and South American countries struggling to develop economically and stabilize politically. Leaders in those countries remember the uncertainty of U.S. support, as U.S. enthusiasm varied with its perceptions of mutual interests, client countries’ democratic ideals and the role of the military, and concerns with human rights violations. Latin American leaders, like those in other regions, must balance the value of external assistance for their militaries with internal demands for those militaries to fit into their respective country’s cultural milieu.

Effects of the global war on terrorism on mil-to-mil programs in Latin America remain unclear. The U.S. priority for the war’s prosecution clearly is not shared by many client countries, nor would it be expected to be, considering the internal conflict and lack of external terrorist threats in many Latin American countries. For some, the global war on terrorism is simply a competitor for resources, not a common threat.

Finally, U.S. goals for mil-to-mil programs are not all acceptable to client countries. Increases in technical and tactical proficiencies are generally welcomed, but attempts to change

military professional culture may be less so. Latin American countries value democracy and rule of law, but not necessarily “mirror image” institutional relationships used in the United States to support those goals. U.S. insistence on institutional arrangements similar to their own is often seen as condescending, semi-imperialistic, or disrespectful of other cultures. A paternalistic approach by the United States to an unequal power relationship with client countries further supports such unflattering views of U.S. programs.

Historical Experience: Four Case Studies.

Nicaragua: What Not To Do. In Nicaragua, civilian control of the military has been greatly overemphasized, at the expense of what should have been the overarching concern—rule of law and limitations of military power. The United States repeatedly made the mistake of thinking that fixing problems in the military would correct the country’s problems. The Army’s problems were products of the culture from which it was created. The United States, at times, helped destroy the military when it was the only power capable of overcoming the corrupt status quo. At other times, the United States supported a military that blatantly violated the values and standards that the United States purported to demand. Results from more recent efforts are difficult to predict, but attempts to provide the military with significant full-time law enforcement roles are probably unwise. Though the military must be capable of filling gaps for overmatched police, the military should not routinely serve as police.

Guatemala: Early Successes Lost. The United States has a 55-year relationship with Guatemala. Initial successes turned a pre-World War II security force into a prestigious, professional, and effective army. Inconsistent policies from

the mid-1950s on have resulted in mistrust by Guatemalans and uneven support by the United States. Since the 1950s there has been a gradual decrease in the Guatemalan Army's effectiveness; it is now an ineffective and demoralized institution.

El Salvador: A Success. Lessons learned by the United States in Vietnam were not taught to El Salvador's Army even though it needed an effective counterinsurgency force. Nevertheless, El Salvador's army led the way to national democracy by overthrowing a corrupt military government. Fortunately, the United States had a series of competent ambassadors and other officials who understood how to help build on successes. The results are a success story for El Salvador and its mil-to-mil program. Changing U.S. priorities and policies now pose a threat to El Salvador successes.

Colombia: A Work in Progress. Colombia is a very different case than the three from Central America, in both the country's size and the issues it faces. U.S. assistance to Colombia changed in the early 1990s to an antidrug campaign and this approach has guided subsequent programs. Future approaches may shift to antiterrorism, counterinsurgency, infrastructure support, and territorial control. It is not clear which of these alternative or complementary campaigns will be pursued or how successful any of them might become. The current mil-to-mil program has succeeded in avoiding the government's fall, has decreased bloodshed and the violation of human rights, and has strengthened the Colombian state. To reinforce these successes the United States and Colombian armies need to align their operational capabilities and planning cultures further. The two countries must also better manage Colombian expectations; Colombians must understand that the U.S. will not provide all the resources and skills necessary to solve Colombian problems.

Strategic Perspectives.

The current State Department leadership is rich in military experience and understands the value of cooperation with DoD during peace to enhance their ability to operate together during war. Support for Theater Security Cooperation is increasing, as illustrated by the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, where the requested budget for FY04 is double that of FY01.

The Army supports Theater Security Cooperation for two reasons: first, it is instructed to do so by the National Security Strategy and secondly, TSCP is at the heart of the combatant commanders' focused strategy. The goals of TSCP are to mitigate the capabilities gap between the United States and its allies, create a more favorable balance of power, and set the conditions for operational success. Additional goals are to enhance civil-military relations and respect for human rights.

The U.S. focus on the GWOT does not necessarily match Latin Americans' focus. Even when both cite terrorism as their primary security issue, they may be concerned with different forms of terrorism. Homeland security is a common interest, but again may coincide on some issues while not others. Most Latin Americans understand that in the current U.S. security environment of GWOT, they are a less important geopolitical area. On the other hand, if they cooperate in GWOT, they may expect to receive greater support for their own issues.

Reports from the Field: U.S. Perspectives.

There are three keys to successful mil-to-mil programs. There should be a shared interest or goal between the United States and partner countries, a holistic approach to governance reform that attempts to match changes in the military with those in other aspects of

government and society, and a consistent long-term U.S. policy that partner countries can understand and trust to last a reasonable length of time.

The combatant commanders and other sources of mil-to-mil have real goods and services available to provide to partner countries, but program results are not always what are expected. Tactical and technical proficiency can be expected to improve, but effectiveness of the overall ability to govern may not. Values consistent with those taught by the United States are unlikely to be much influenced. U.S. access to countries for operational or intelligence needs is sometimes improved, but depends on many issues not addressed by mil-to-mil programs.

Reports from the Field: Perspectives from Abroad.

All Latin American countries are not alike and should not be treated as such by the United States. The United States shares concerns with most Latin American countries about security and economic integration and should partner to address them. For successful resolution of common concerns, there must be a realization by the United States that organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and corruption are the priority threats for much of Latin America, not the global war on terrorism. The United States and Latin America can agree to address all common threats, but priorities for the partners are likely to remain different.

The quality of future U.S.-Latin American relations will depend largely on establishing or maintaining mutual trust and respect. Though many goals are common, Latin America is and wants to remain culturally distinct. These countries also want to be seen as partners and believe that the power inequality between partners need not result in patronization. Nor should shifting U.S. priorities lead to the region's neglect. Latin America will resist U.S. pressures

to turn armies into smaller constabularies with reduced roles in internal development.

Conclusion: The Way Ahead.

The way ahead cannot be determined until there is agreement on the desired goal of the journey; U.S. Departments of Defense and State must agree to program goals. Those goals must remain consistent and must be upheld by ambassadors who have the support and cooperation of combatant commanders, and they must be achieved through cooperation with the client countries.

At the program level, there are many regional positive trends to reinforce—in military professionalism, democratization, civil-military relations, and governance. But the programs must be consistent with U.S. partners' over-all efforts to address their real problem—that of governance.

An increased emphasis on assessment of program goals is needed. Measures of technical and tactical proficiency are available, generally used, and show success. Other goals, such as value changes, are more difficult to assess, more difficult to achieve, and sometimes thought to be inappropriate.

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